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GETTING A START

By
NATHANIEL C. FOWLER, Jr.

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THE BEST PLACE.

The mountain top is small. There is hardly room enough there for the few who reach its height; and, unless those who do keep a firm foothold, they may be pushed off and dashed to pieces.

The way to the mountain top is steep and rugged, the rocks are slippery, and the path is full of landslides.

The valley is broad and fertile, and there is room enough there for planting and for harvesting.

The ordinary man can earn his living in the valley; the extraordinary man may be able to attach himself to the mountain top.

I am not asking you young man, not to travel upward, nor am I suggesting that you forever remain on the plains; but I am attempting to picture the dangers of steep climbing, and the liability of not being able to find a foothold at the top.

Better, far better, be a good tiller of the soil down in the green valley than starve among the mountain's rocks.

In these days of strenuous business, of liberal education, and of opportunity, the old adage that "there is always room at the top" is not as true as it used to be, for, even though there may be room at the very top, one must take fearful chances in climbing, and he will meet strenuous men en route, ready and anxious to win, not only by advancing themselves, but by pushing others down.

The tendency to go beyond one's ability, to occupy positions unnatural and difficult to hold, is responsible for many a failure, and has ruined many men who would have been successful had they been contented and industrious, with good prospect of prosperity.

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff than that which drives a man out of himself into unknown regions, or into places too high for him to gain a foothold, a footing which, even if he does gain it, he may be unable to keep.

It is your duty to do your best, to make the most of yourself, to encourage rather than to cramp ambition, to use common sense in the making of yourself, that brand of good sense which does not allow you to stay below your level and which will prevent you from striving to go beyond it.

Thousands of men move from where they are, dissatisfied and disgruntled, and enter new and unknown fields, when, if they had remained at home, making the best of their opportunities, they would have been worth more to themselves and to the world.

Where you are, unless it is below the surface, may be the best place in which for you to work and to stay. Certainly, you should not allow yourself to leave your base of operations until you are sure that where you are is not the place for you to be in, and until you know of a location within the probable scope of your capacity.

Beware of the top, unless there is a safe road leading to it.

Fighters Who Never See a Battle.
 During a sea fight the engine-room men tend the great engines of a battleship with all the care that they would bestow upon the same delicate yet mighty mechanism in time of peace, roaming listlessly, yet with a definite purpose, around the engine room with oil cans in hand, bestowing drops of lubricant here and there as required.

Their and the stokers' is almost—no quite—the hardest part of the whole grim drama of a naval battle, for they are absolutely cut off from the fight, and are only cognizant of it by the quivering of their ship as the great turrets over their heads fire, or as the enemy's shells thud against the armor, or when some stray shot finds its way through the steel wall and the bunkers to the boilers. Such an event blends a whole stakehold in one frenzied orgy of death—death by exploding shell and scattering fragments of steel; death by awful wounds from flying, burning coals, or death by scalding, hissing, blinding steam as the water tubes burst all around them.

Boy Critics.
 For many years the boys of Trinity college, Dublin, made and unmade the reputation of operatic stars. They always sat in the highest gallery, and were recognized as the real critics of an opera. "I remember," says Barton McGuckin, the well-known English tenor, "there was a fellow, Thomas or some such name, whose career was blasted by a witty gallery boy. Thomas was anything but graceful. He had but one gesture, which consisted in bringing first one, then the other hand to his heart and letting it fly back straight before him. It was very much like the sort of motion a man would make if he deep water. He sang an Italian love song, working his arms as described. When he finished a voice from the gallery broke the silence: "Ah, Miesher Toomasi, you ain't mooch of a singer, but I'll wager ye'd make a fine swimmer." The audience screamed with delight. Thomas had to leave the stage.

SOCIETY.

"I am not in society this winter," says a young society woman. "I am too busy to go into society," remarks a young man.

What is "society" anyway, the society about which the foregoing was spoken? Really, I don't know, and the three big dictionaries refuse to enlighten me. At a guess, I should say that probably the young people quoted refer to the collection of persons they meet when they go out, when they are away from home, at balls, parties, and other invitation functions, and not necessarily to the individuals whom they visit. Perhaps they are unfortunate enough to belong to some alleged exclusive form of society, or to some clique or collection of conceited people, who, because they don't know where they stand, assume to stand for something about which they know nothing.

Thousands, yes, hundreds of thousands, of young people have injured their presents and discounted their futures by going into what they call "society." Yes, many men and women have sacrificed their souls upon the altar of "society."

Young people should have friends, they should not be bookworms or room hermits. They should intermingle, they should exchange experiences, play games of conversation, and other games; but all this does not mean "going into society," for "society" is commonly understood as simply another word for excess, with or without the winecup.

It is a significant fact that our great merchant princes, our men of prodigious intellect, our famous discoverers and scientists, our men of mark in every walk of life, care more for sociability than for society, and not one in a hundred of them is in "society." They live natural lives, make friends among their kind, and enjoy social intercourse. They don't "care a fig" whether Mrs. Tone invites them to her most exclusive ball, or whether Mr. Highbrow includes them in his list of dinner guests.

Many men of wealth, and more men who haven't any, sacrifice the vitality of life to get into "society," and when they get in they spend half of their time keeping in. When they become old enough to know better, they go out into Nature's out-of-doors, breathe the fresh air, and mentally, and sometimes physically, kick themselves for the folly of their silly ambition.

Don't worry about finding your "society" level. Your level will come to you, and any level you try to reach, which is either above or below your proper sphere, is disastrous.

Bear in mind, young man and young woman, that mere money, the ability to dance the tango, and the capacity for small talk, are not keys which will unlock the door of good society.

For your ancestors came here in the overcrowded Mayflower, or your several times removed grandfather chased Indiana, remember that you may not be any better than other people with a hazy past, for the whole world feeds on the same kind of meat, sleeps in similar beds and wears much-alike clothes, if it can get them.

Good Manager.

A bare-headed woman with a faded and ragged dress solicited alms the other evening of a gentleman who was crossing the City park. He came to a halt and asked:

"Is it for drink?"
 "No, sir; it's for food."
 "But I don't know how you live. I have to practice economy in order to have money in my pocket. You may be extravagant, for all I know. How much money have you spent today?"

"Well, sir, I've spent seven cents—that will run five of us on cold potatoes so far; and if I can get three more we'll top off with bread, and water before going to bed. Might leave out the bread if I can find a bit of tar to thicken the water and deceive the children. Can you draw it any finer than that, sir?"

The man held out a dime as he passed.

Hannah Snell, "Female Soldier."
 Hannah Snell was born at Worcester, England, on April 23, 1727, the daughter of a hosier. In order to seek her husband who had abandoned her, in 1745 she donned man's attire and enlisted as a soldier in Guise's regiment of foot, but soon deserted, and shipped on board the sloop Swallow, under her brother-in-law's name of James Gray. She was wounded in the siege of Pondicherry, but succeeded in extracting the bullet without calling in a surgeon. When recovered she served before the mast on the Tartar and Eitham, but when paid off she resumed woman's costume. Her adventures were published under the title of "The Female Soldier." In 1759 she afterwards gave exhibitions in military uniform in London. She died insane in Bethlehem hospital London, on February 6, 1792.

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